

English language teacher development in a Russian university: Context, problems and implications



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HIGHLIGHTS

- English language teaching is a challenge for higher education in Russia.
- In-service teacher training is a valuable tool for professional development.
- Student evaluation of teaching (SET) is useful to measure the results of teacher training programmes.
- The system of teacher training should be correlated in Russia as a response to internationalisation of higher education.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 31 May 2016

Received in revised form

2 December 2016

Accepted 26 January 2017

Available online 2 February 2017

Keywords:

Student evaluation of teaching (SET)

Teacher development programme

English language teaching

English as a foreign language (EFL)

Higher education

ABSTRACT

The evaluation of teacher professional development efficiency has always been an issue that has attracted attention of professionals in education. This paper reports on the results of a two-year English language teacher professional development programme following a Needs Analysis study conducted by Cambridge ESOL in 2012. Longitudinal research shows that in Russia English language teaching has several problems which exist throughout decades. This article focuses on some of them: class interaction mode; the use of native (Russian) language in class; error correction strategies employed by teachers. A new approach to evaluation was employed by asking students and teachers the same questions from different perspectives on areas identified during the needs analysis study. The results varied in significance, though some positive changes have been noticed in class interaction mode, little has changed in the error correction strategies, the use of Russian in the classroom seems to be quite reasonable and does not interfere with learning. Overall, the study may be useful for general audience, especially for the post-Soviet countries as it provides evidence of change management and their impact on ELT. The findings presented in this paper seek to contribute to the formulation or adjustment of policies related to educational reforms, such as curriculum reform and teacher professional development in non-English-speaking countries.

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1. Introduction

Internationalisation has been a priority for universities around the world over recent decades and one of the most significant drivers of change that modern universities are facing [1–4]. Key analyses of internationalisation in higher education discuss

different features [5–8]. Academic internationalisation involves aspects such as student mobility – participation in international exchange programmes; study opportunities for foreign students – provision of courses in English specifically designed for and delivered to international students; academic mobility – staff giving lectures and speaking at conferences abroad; publication of research papers in international journals; applying for, qualifying for and obtaining grants; and organising international conferences [9].

This implies that there should be no language barrier restricting international academic activity and the global *lingua franca* of the

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academic world is English (see Ref. [10]). Teaching English to all students is therefore essential for any university which aims to internationalise. Student mobility, conference participation and international recognition of research are all integrally connected with English language proficiency.

Success in developing academic internationalisation depends on close cooperation between the participants: managers and teaching staff and must be managed within the resources available to the university [11]. The global indicators associated with internationalisation mentioned in the Universities' Road maps (strategic university development plans, designed by Russian universities for their own context) aimed at enhancing university competitiveness on the world educational market include: the percentage of academics with sufficient command of English, which will allow the academics to lecture and to write articles in English; the ratio of published articles (recorded on the Web of Science and Scopus) to academic staff; the percentage of articles published in cooperation with foreign authors; and the percentage of foreign students enrolled in the university.

Most Russian federal universities have been given a clear mandate to position themselves within 100 of the Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings (QS WUR) by 2020, which presents a considerable challenge. QS WUR is a global research and rating of world universities based on the study by a British Consulting company Quacquarelli Symonds [12]. Russian universities had to think about their students' English language proficiency not only in terms of complying with Federal State Educational Standards [13], but also with the international expectations of the English language proficiency of different universities abroad. Having analysed the language requirements of the first 100 QS universities, it would be correct to say that the lowest IELTS score is from 6.0 to 6.5. IELTS is a high-stakes English test for study, migration and work, where the scoring system ranges from 1 to 9, the latter being the highest score meaning a fully operation command of the language [14]. This suggests that Russian universities offering courses for international students should set similar expectations.

There have been little or no studies investigating the status of English language proficiency among bachelor degree students in relation to international standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) [15] in the Russian higher education context. This fact leaves us unable to relate the situation in one university to the wider context of English language teaching. Indirect evidence of a very low level of English of university alumni comes from a study on how employers evaluate their job applicants [16] which reported that "[...] a recent survey by Kelly Services 110 of 6500 graduate job applicants from across Russia, mostly young white-collar workers from big cities (population of one million and more), revealed that the majority of candidates at all levels were rated as having poor or no proficiency in English. This finding confirms the impression that exit levels are currently low for a number of reasons, one of which may be that there is no valid, reliable exit test calibrated to an international scale." [16:45].

The Federal State Educational standards (2012–2013), among other stipulations, require bachelor degree graduates to be able to communicate freely in the academic environment, to be able to participate in international conferences and to be prepared for international exchanges. These activities are all premised on students being able to communicate in a foreign language (preferably English). Having studied the context of Russian Universities, the researchers [16] suggested that a CEFR Level of B2 would be an appropriate target for students at Russian universities. According to Cambridge English, the agency responsible for the content of IELTS, scores of 6.0 and 6.5 on IELTS both fall within the B2 range [17].

2. Context

Ural Federal University (UrFU), situated on the border between Europe and Asia, is one of the largest universities in Russia with approximately 28,000 students and 2500 academic staff. The university has set a goal of entering the Top-100 in the QS World University Rankings (QS WUR) by 2020. This means that the university has to comply not only with national standards but also with the requirements of QS WUR, and the English language (EL) proficiency of its students and faculty has been given high priority. The facilitation system of English language learning by university faculty has been described in detail in Ref. [18], therefore, academic staff is not the focus of this study.

To evaluate the average English language proficiency level among bachelor degree students in UrFU, the administration made a decision to attract an external authoritative body in the sphere of English language proficiency testing, Cambridge English Language Assessment, who conducted an in-depth study: testing about 1000 bachelor degree students, 100 English language teachers, doing classroom observation, talking to University decision-makers. The results of this study were presented in the Needs analysis report [19], which was specific and context based. The findings relevant to this article are presented below.

Students only learnt English for the first two years of their four-year programme. This meant that they study English in class for a maximum of 216 h, spread over two years of study. The report [19] concluded that this was insufficient as most of the students were hardly able to read in English: "At first glance, UFU's stipulation of 216 h of study, supported by 216 h of contact time, does seem broadly in line with UFU's stated aim of all UFU undergraduates obtaining a B1 level of language proficiency. However, the CEFR guidelines assume motivated adult learners and discussions with focus groups of teachers suggested that a significant number of students have little or no motivation to study English, seeing it as unnecessary for their future academic or professional success" [19].

The conclusions drawn by the experts aligned with the research into English language teaching previously conducted in Russia. An extensive study supported by the British Council was published in 2002 [20], which collected data from more than 100 higher education institutions in Russia with about 5682 respondents. Data were collected from surveys as well as lesson observations. The results relevant to our study are the following: 1) professional training of teachers was mainly formal and due to lack of financial and time resources was based on internal departmental seminars, which focused on language development, methodology, using a computer, etc., with teachers stating that they follow the Russian educational standards only [20:41–42]; 2) error correction in the classroom was on spot in 71% of cases [20:92]; 3) teacher-centred approach was the main one in the classroom with the teacher – students interaction mode in 44% of cases and student – student interaction mode in only 8% of cases [20:94].

As Ural Federal University initiated the benchmarking into its own situation to see if there is any difference between the situation in Russian universities in general and its own, the university officials were ready to start a professional development programme to enhance English language teaching situation in their own context. The report [19] helped to plan the implementation stages with launching a multi-layered teacher professional development stages: 1) sending twelve teachers to Cambridge English Language Assessment for a two-week professional development course, 2) conducting an in-house teacher training course for those who did not go abroad, 3) running preparation courses for a Teaching Knowledge Test, 4) getting authorization for a CELTA course in UrFU and 5) training own EL teachers in CELTA. All of these were supported and financed by UrFU.

3. Theoretical background to change

3.1. Evaluating professional development

There is a lot of literature on professional development, both pre-service and in-service. The idea of pre-service and in-service induction courses as an essential part of professional development is highlighted in the study by Ref. [21], who came up with recommendations on running induction programmes. Some of their recommendations are very useful; for example, to divide the course into three phases: pre-course, in-course and post-course tasks and arrangements, which is the most efficient from their point of view organization of the induction programme. The need for professional development in general is discussed in quite a range of books and articles, for example [22], provide a survey of current approaches to professional development (PD) for language teachers, who seek opportunities for in-service teacher education. Day [23] reported seven common ingredients of successful professional development, which are inspiration (sharing vision), expositions, discussions, opportunities for cross reference of standards, training in new skills, opportunities to experiment, and coaching. Another authoritative expert in English language teaching (ELT) Harmer [24] in his book addressed to English language (EL) teachers describes in detail possible options for professional development: self-reflection, keeping teaching journals, reading professional literature, joining English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching forums, doing research, developing with colleagues, etc. These are valuable guidelines for self-developing teachers; however, this does not reflect the specific problems that UrFU faced according to the report [19]. Çelik et al. [25] speak of a context similar to Russian: a lot of students fail to achieve a satisfactory level of English due to insufficient professional knowledge of EFL teachers, the authors stress the need for PD on a regular basis. In Russia EFL teachers often fail to develop professionally due to the lack of guidance and institutionalised system of PD, as well as qualitative pre-service teacher training programmes.

However, relatively little attention has been given to the evaluation of teachers' professional training and post-training performance in the classroom through the students' perception and surveys of teachers, which is the focus of our study. One study to have focused on this in a university setting employed semi-structured interviews with all full-time lecturers, two department heads and course experience surveys from the EFL students at a large university in Vietnam by Wei [26]. The researcher concluded that the combination of both summative (students' surveys) and formative (classroom observation) evaluation made the EFL teachers self-assessments less effective [26]. This research shows that evaluating the effectiveness of language teaching and using classroom observation as a tool for professional development may not be enough; the researcher highlights the idea that the criteria for evaluation should be shared by all the research participants and expectations should be voiced out. For our study, this research is noteworthy due to several factors: first, it is done in a university, as there are not many studies in this area; second, it deals with EFL teaching performance, which is also relevant for our study. Nevertheless, our study is more focused and looks into the evaluation of very specific possible changes, defined in the Needs analysis report [19] and problems which are typical of the Russian university context.

3.2. Student evaluation of teaching (SET)

The validity of SET has been extensively described in the literature; and Spooren et al. [27] made a thorough overview of 160 published pieces, both articles and books, analysing all the pros

(e.g., "Useful SET instruments are based on both educational theory and the rigorous investigation of their utility and validity" [27]:627)) and cons (e.g. "[...] many ad hoc SET instruments that have never been tested continue to be used for administrative decision-making" [27]:627)) of SETs and came to the conclusion that, although SETs are potentially very useful, their validity needs to be investigated further. Originally SET was intended primarily for formative purposes; such evaluations came into use for faculty personnel decisions in the 1970s [28]. Later, SET procedures have been included as a key mechanism in internal quality-assurance processes as a way of demonstrating an institution's performance in accounting and auditing practices [29]. No studies or articles have been found that would focus specifically on one aspect of EFL teaching and evaluation of the outcomes of a teacher training programme. The focus of this research is to evaluate the impact of professional development and changes in the classroom practices through the opinion of participating teachers and "verifying" this through students' vision by asking them the same questions that the teachers were asked, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of teacher training.

3.3. Curriculum reform

Following the Needs analysis report [19], a number of steps were taken to improve and account for the quality of English language provision. A new curriculum with a more communicative focus has been developed and is currently being piloted in four (out of 17) UrFU Institutes: the Institutes of Natural Sciences; Political and Social Sciences; Radio Engineering and the Higher School of Economics and Management. The pilot programme involves 40 English language teachers and 1000 first year undergraduate students. Under the new curriculum students are streamed according to the results of a written English placement test administered on entry. Teachers then assess students' speaking skills to fine-tune the initial placement. The amount of time dedicated to the study of English has been doubled from a total of just under 300 h spread over two years to almost six hundred hours spread over four years. Minimum exit targets have been set for each stream ranging from B1 for the lowest level (A1 or below at entry) to B2+ for the highest. Achievement will be verified through international examinations, linked to the CEFR. As well as providing widely recognized qualifications for students, these provide a basis for tracking any improvement in students' English language skills over time.

These innovations for a Russian university make new demands on teachers, radically changing what is expected of them in the classroom. Teacher training is seen to be essential for the success of the new curriculum and there has been a substantial investment in professional development. This is intended to foster a move away from grammar-translation pedagogy in teacher-centred classrooms towards communicative language teaching in a learner-centred environment. In advance of piloting, twelve teachers were sent to the UK to attend a two-week teacher training course and a TKT preparation course was established at the university. The TKT certificate was introduced as a minimum professional requirement for all EFL teachers at UrFU. All teachers involved in piloting have undergone initial training on assessing speaking and eight were certified as Cambridge English Speaking examiners.

Another strand in the reform effort has been an increased concern for accountability. External assessment (Cambridge English examinations) was used to establish both teachers' and learners' current level of English. The external tests being used in the pilot programme are Cambridge English: Key (A2), Preliminary (B1) and First (B2). These Cambridge English tests are used as diagnostic tools at the beginning of the year, as progress tests in the middle of the academic year and for final assessment at the end of

each academic year.

This study concerns the impact of the curriculum reforms on the teaching and learning of English at UrFU focusing on the question of whether the reform is making a difference in terms of classroom practices in those areas revealed by the report [19] and whether current classroom practices in the pilot programme are more in line with the intentions of the reform.

4. Problems

At the outset of the project, a needs analysis was undertaken by external consultants [19] involving lesson observations, teacher focus groups and discussion with the Heads of the faculties. This concluded that many students failed to attain the targeted B1 level of English by graduation and identified a number of challenges relating to the teaching and learning of English at the university that might hinder internationalisation efforts, especially among non-linguistic students (NLS): those majoring in subjects other than languages. These challenges included limited motivation on the part of some students (raising doubts about whether they completed the mandated hours of self-study) and the lack of a coherent, standardized student experience. Not only did language curricula vary across departments, but individual teachers were also free to choose their own materials and might pay little attention to the formal programmes [19].

To develop the students' communicative competence, it was suggested that there would need to be some fundamental changes in the teachers' classroom practices. It was observed that teachers tended to focus instruction on the written language, using an outmoded grammar-translation methodology. Specific issues revealed by the classroom observations included the following:

- 1) In class, students were mainly listening to the teacher and not interacting with each other;
- 2) The ratio of teacher talk to student talk was very high;
- 3) Students were seated apart from each other in rows facing the teacher, limiting opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction;
- 4) Teachers tended to focus on the more active learners, overlooking the more reticent members of the class;
- 5) Some teachers were more conscientious than others in setting self-study tasks while in some cases, learners had not completed the self-study tasks set [19];
- 6) In almost all lessons, teachers used overt on-the-spot oral correction techniques exclusively.

4.1. Research design

The main research question that is the focus of this study is *How have classroom practices changed after the two years of the reform introduced into the curriculum and professional development?*

4.2. Methods and materials

To structure the process of change and make the evaluation scheme clearer, the following model was used (Fig. 1), where Phases 1–4 were discussed and described earlier in the article; here the focus is on Phase 5 *Evaluation of classroom practices*.

Building on the small-scale observational baseline study, there was a need to involve more teachers and to establish the generalizability of its findings. The use of focus groups was considered, but in the Russian cultural context, employees may avoid expressing their honest opinions to the administrative staff. Instead, the decision was taken to survey teachers by a questionnaire, providing a guarantee of anonymity. As a check on the validity of teacher

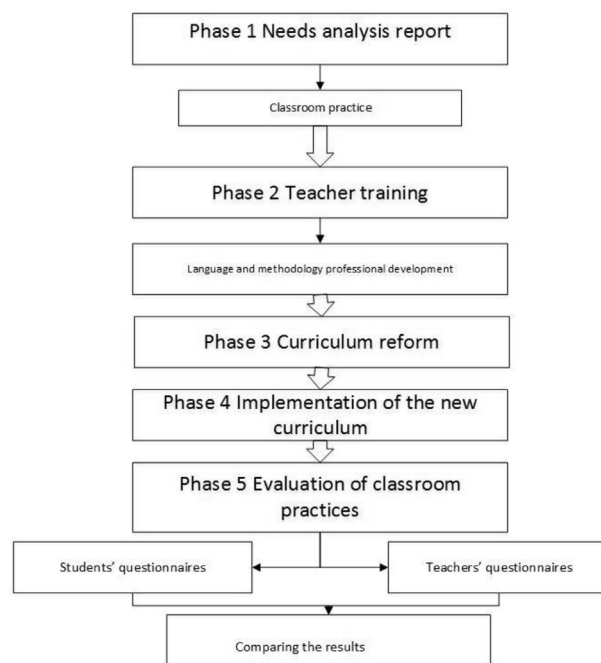


Fig. 1. Steps of professional training.

responses, students were also included and asked to respond to the same questions. The aim was to make the survey user-friendly, brief and practical to encourage maximum participation, but also to make it as comprehensive as possible within these constraints.

Following the first year of piloting (two years after the start of the professional development programme) the questionnaires were distributed to teachers and students involved in the pilot. Both students and teachers were asked the same questions, but with wording reflecting their different perspectives.

The questionnaire was designed in close cooperation with the consultants from Cambridge English Language Assessment. The questions were chosen relating to classroom practices mentioned in their needs analysis report:

- 1) Grouping students during the lessons - addressing the issues connected with student passivity; patterns of interaction and teacher talking time;
- 2) On-the-spot error correction – addressing the issue of teachers not delaying correction and focusing on accuracy;
- 3) Homework practices - addressing the issues connected with the frequency of homework setting and completion;
- 4) Use of Russian – addressing the issues of the Russian predominance in the classroom of EFL.

The student questionnaires were administered in class in a paper-based format. The teachers were invited to participate via email and their questionnaires were administered online, using Survey Monkey. All the questionnaires were anonymous to give respondents the freedom to express their point of view; however, the teachers were given the option of providing their email addresses to facilitate follow up interviews. The student questionnaire appears in the appendix.

The innovation of our research into professional development impact on classroom practices is in its idea to measure the effectiveness. The decision was made to ask both the participating teachers and the main stakeholders of the learning process: the students, to evaluate the results of in-service teacher training

Table 1
Distribution of student questionnaire respondents by CEFR level.

Level	%
Below A1	0.4
A1	18.8
A2	26.3
B1	18.4
B2	23.5
C1	4.7
Not sure	4.3
Did not answer the question	3.5

(Fig. 1). Most of the questionnaire items consisted of questions with Likert-scale response options (strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree). A limited number of open-ended questions were included to allow the respondents the opportunity to comment further. After the questionnaire was compiled it was trialled on a limited sample (30) of second-year students, after that some of the questions were modified to make them clearer and more comprehensible for students. Once finalized, the forms were distributed among the teachers of English and administered during regular classes by a different teacher. The results were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and later processed with SPSS Version 15 to find out the difference/correlation between the students' and the teachers' answers. Survey Monkey is computer software, which automatically performs statistical analysis of data and presents the results in a pie- or bar-chart format, which is quite helpful for the research purposes. SPSS 15 is a very widely used computer programme designed to aid the statistical analysis of data, particularly data collected in the course of research [30].

5. Findings

5.1. Participants

Out of the 40 teachers participating in the pilot (from the Institute of Fundamental Education, the Institute of Natural Sciences, and the Institute of Social and Political Sciences) just over a half (22) responded to the questionnaire. Seven were from the Institute of Fundamental Education, ten were from the Institute of Natural Sciences and five were from the Institute of Social and Political Sciences. Seventeen teachers were in the 22–35 age range; three were between 36 and 45; and two were over 55. Most (20, or 91%) were female, reflecting the picture across Russian universities found by Frumina&West [16]. All the teachers had either a linguistic or a pedagogical background, with formal higher education in these fields, and held a Bachelor's degree (7), a Master's Degree

(14) or a Doctorate (1). The majority were quite experienced, having worked in the profession for over six years: of the nineteen who responded to this question, four had 1–2 years experience, three had 3–5 years, nine 6–10 years and three over 10 years. In terms of international qualifications, 17 of the respondents had a Teaching Knowledge Test (TKT) certificate, 14 had Certificate of English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) and one had a Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults (DELTA). This broadly reflects the university's intentions for a teaching body holding internationally recognized qualifications. Ten out of these teachers held Cambridge English: Advanced (CEFR Level C1) and 12 teachers held Cambridge English: Proficiency (CEFR Level C2) certificate.

255 first-year students out of 1000 enrolled in the three pilot institutes responded. 96% of these were aged 18 or 19, which is typical for first year students. 40% were male and 60% female. 27% were enrolled in the Institute of Natural Sciences; 22% in the Institute of Social and Political Sciences and 51% in the Higher School of Economics and Management.

The distribution of the students across the CEFR levels is shown in Table 1:

Almost all of the students reported their native language as Russian. Of the remainder, two students stated that their native language was Tajik, one Armenian and one Bashkir.

5.2. Language of instruction

Non-parametric Mann-Whitney U tests revealed significant ($p < 0.01$) differences between the teachers and the students in their perceptions of the language of instruction, classroom organization and the frequency of homework assignments (Table 2).

In relation to the amount of Russian used in the classroom, answers from the students and the teachers show that the respondents viewed the situation very differently. Whereas the teachers appeared to believe that they used more English than Russian in their classrooms, the students tended to disagree (Fig. 2).

As the students do not generally agree that the teachers teach in English more than in Russian, it is worth exploring why Russian was being used in class. Both the teachers and the students most often mentioned explanation of language points (grammar S:114, T:14; vocabulary S:99, T:11) with classroom management being mentioned less often, but with the students being more likely to report use of Russian for these purposes (instructions S:83, T:3, discipline S:64, T:3). Among "other" answers teachers said that they use Russian:

- ✓ "When doing translation tasks";
- ✓ "for controlling students' understanding of the material and testing their translation skills";
- ✓ "when I help to translate ESP texts".

One teacher said that s/he does not use Russian in the classroom at all.

In this case it is interesting to know if the amount of the use of Russian depends on the students' level, meaning that lower level students require more Russian in the classroom than higher level students; that is why the following question reveals that from the teachers' point of view they do not abuse Russian in the classroom, whereas the students state that the teachers do not always use English in the classroom (Fig. 3). The teachers' open-ended responses may be summarized as follows: "The higher the level, the less Russian I use", or "it's evident that A0-A1 level students sometimes have difficulties understanding what the teacher is saying and slower repetition or paraphrasing often can't be enough". This area requires further work on and further awareness raising on the part of the teachers in terms of the share of the

Table 2
Non parametric test of difference.

Item	Mann-Whitney U	p
The teacher teaches in English more than in Russian	383.0	0.000
Students talk to other students in English more than in Russian	1422.5	0.006
The teacher encourages us to speak to each other in English	2045.5	0.159
Individual work	1862.0	0.019
Pair work	1591.0	0.000
Group work	1859.5	0.017
Whole class work	2559.5	0.794
Frequency of homework	1911.5	0.004
Homework checked by teacher	2404.5	0.280
Homework checked in class	2578.0	0.875
Minutes spent on homework	1318.0	0.000

Russian language in the classroom.

Although both the students and the teachers tended to agree or strongly agree (88.7% of students, 95.5% of teachers) that teachers did encourage students to speak English to each other, the students were significantly less likely to agree that they actually did speak more in English than in Russian (Fig. 3): 36.5% of the students disagreed with this statement, compared with just two (9.1%) of the teachers.

Another issue raised by the needs analysis concerned classroom organization. Under the old curriculum, classroom activities tended to be limited to individual and whole-class activities with the predominance of teacher talk. Students were not communicating with each other during the lessons: they interacted only with the

students considering that classes ‘always’ involved pair work compared with 81.8% of teachers.

5.3. Homework assignments

The needs analysis questioned whether students were completing the required number of self-study hours (homework). The questionnaire included items focusing on whether homework was set, how much time was devoted to completing it and whether the teachers checked it.

The teachers and the students agree that homework is both assigned and checked (Fig. 5), suggesting that the situation has changed as intended (see Fig. 6).

Moreover, students state that they do homework practically on a regular basis; however, it must be acknowledged that such responses might be connected with the Hawthorne effect, which means that the survey participants (students) know what answer is expected from them and want to be portrayed better than they are.

5.4. Error correction

The report [19] revealed that UrFU EFL teachers tend to correct students' mistakes on the spot. This type of practice is not recommended by any books on methodology as it discourages students from speaking English and impedes fluency practice. “Constant interruption from the teacher will destroy the purpose of the speaking activity” ([31]:94).

Fig. 7 shows the respondents' responses to the issue of on-the-spot correction. The discrepancy between the teachers' and the students' perceptions is clearly seen. The teachers deny the fact that they correct students on the spot, whereas the majority of the students either strongly or just agree with the fact that they are corrected on the spot. The teachers' responses may be explained by the Hawthorne effect, i.e. they are aware of the expectations from them, but do not want to show that they do not meet the expectations or it is difficult for them to reflect on their own teaching practice. The issue of on the spot correction was addressed in all the professional development sessions along with the certification courses by Cambridge English. This issue needs constant support and address by the head teachers and it should also be given attention during lesson observations.

6. Implications

The conducted study allows us to identify the following areas to reflect upon, which are closely connected with the professional development programme and its impact on classroom practices:

- ✓ The class grouping modes became more varied, moving from using whole class activity techniques where the teachers asked questions and the students answered them to pair work, group work, and individual work. This is the positive effect of the introduction of the in-service training;
- ✓ The share of the use of the Russian language in the classroom still remains an issue. The teachers should be aware of the amount of Russian they use in the classroom and be able to judge consciously the balance between the two languages and the effectiveness of its use. Alternatively, further research should find out how much Russian impedes the process of learning, because the students are studying in a monolingual environment and the use of Russian for technical issues may not be crucial for a learner-centred environment and may just facilitate the learning process and make it more comfortable. Moreover, it should be acknowledged that having bilingual teachers in the classroom is an advantage on its own, as it helps

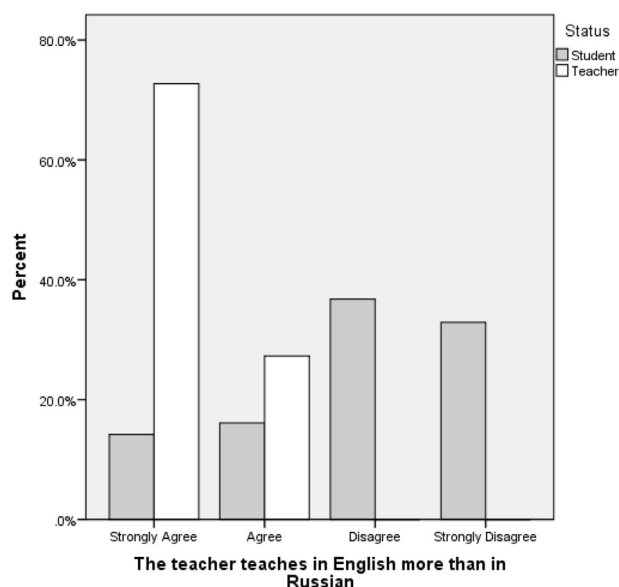


Fig. 2. Teacher and student perceptions of language instruction.

Why does the teacher use Russian in class (%)?

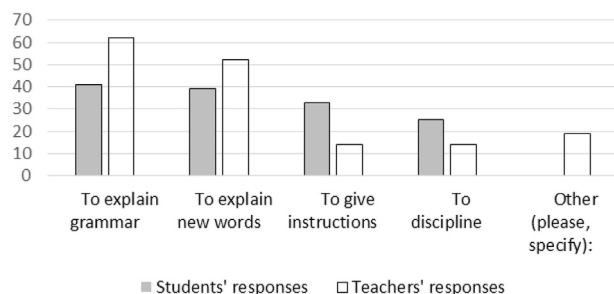


Fig. 3. Use of Russian in the classroom.

teacher. Overall, the picture that emerged from both the teachers' and the students' responses was encouraging. Both groups reported frequent use of pair and group activities, which suggests that practices have changed in line with the intentions of the reform initiative. 86.4% of the teachers and 71.0% of the students reported that classes ‘always’ or ‘sometimes’ included group work. On the other hand, the teachers and the students had different perspectives on the relative frequency of pair work (Fig. 4) with 40.6% of

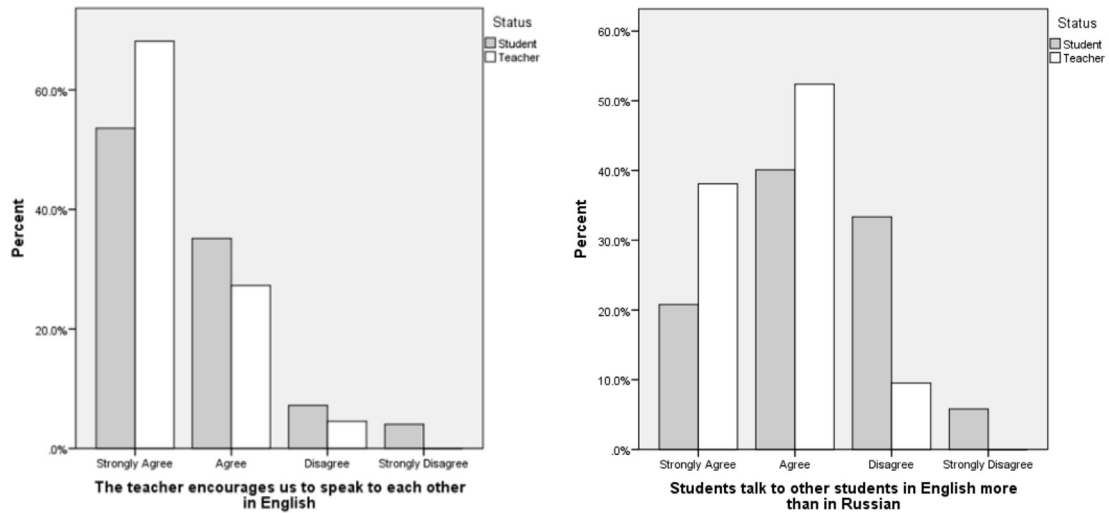


Fig. 4. Use of English in the classroom.

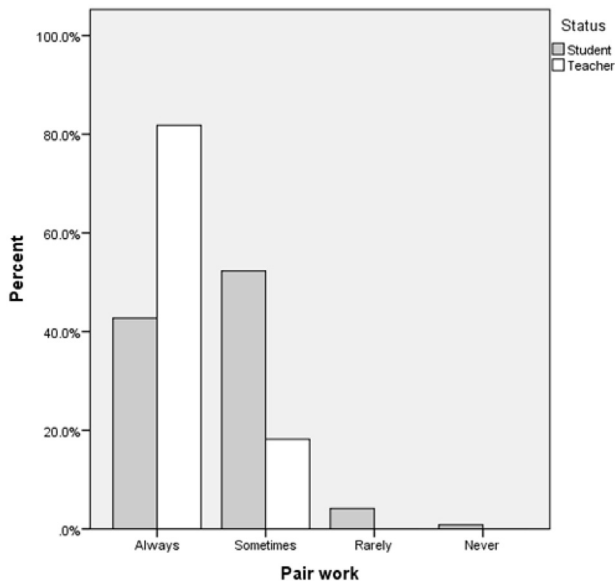


Fig. 5. Pair work in the classroom.

to cope with misunderstanding of some concepts that can be easily eliminated by using L1;

- ✓ The issue of homework as a way of enhancing the students' immersion into the English language environment was specifically addressed in the course of the two year professional development. The survey results show that this work has been successful: the teachers assign homework and check it, which is confirmed by the students. The next step in this direction is the most effective use of self-study time and the research into the targeted homework; the students' awareness of the use of homework for their own English language improvement;
- ✓ On the spot correction of the students' mistakes turned out to be an issue that has not changed much over two years. This might mean that the teachers do not accept changes in some areas of their classroom practice and they need further support and encouragement in this respect. This issue needs further reflection on the part of the teachers to make them understand that "The distinction between accuracy and fluency aims is again

important here. If the objective is accuracy, then immediate correction is likely to be useful; if the aim is fluency, then lengthy immediate correction that diverts from the flow of speaking is less appropriate. We either need to correct briefly and unobtrusively as we go or save any correction for after the activity has finished or later" [32]:286].

The overall impression of the professional development influence on classroom practices is positive. It can be stated that the process of change has started, although it definitely needs further attention and work on.

The overall conclusion is that changes in classroom practices are very difficult to implement, even with proper teacher training. This is in line with the study by Uysal [33], who did a research into an in-service programme for primary school language teachers in Turkey: she came to the conclusion that in-service training should be planned not in a top-down one-shot manner, but as an ongoing professional learning process with a follow-up component.

One of the possible reasons is that it is difficult for teachers to switch to the new mode of teaching if they are quite experienced. Therefore, managers initiating the change should be aware of the fact that the steps to the change should be backed up by constant support of the teachers, who need a lot of help in this respect. To ensure smoother implementation of the envisaged changes, classroom observation may be useful at the initial, post-training stage with the observing teachers giving as much encouraging support as possible.

7. Conclusion

The study findings have broad practical implications for language teacher training: future training sessions should be focused on areas that turned out to be resistant to change over the period observed. Moreover, introducing a system of mentoring, trainer-supported peer-observation and, possibly, experienced trainer observation on a regular basis can also help to achieve sustainable results in professional development. While the predominance of the Russian language in the classroom may be re-evaluated and further analysed, as there might be reasonable grounds for its use, the issue of on-the-spot error correction needs special attention, as it is very important not to discourage students from speaking English during the lessons. The same may be said about the patterns of

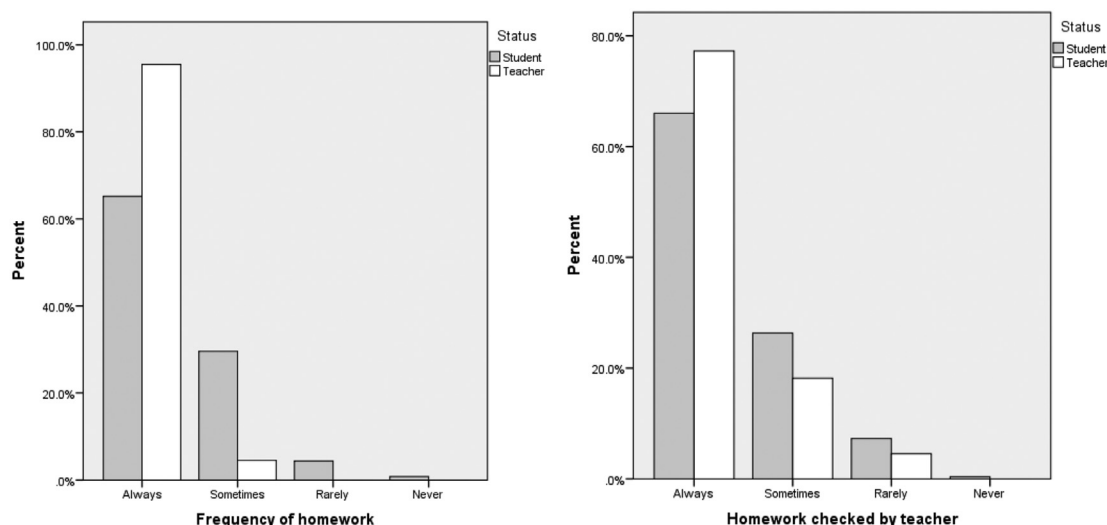


Fig. 6. Frequency and monitoring of homework.

During a lesson, the teacher corrects student's mistakes straight away, interrupting the student (%).

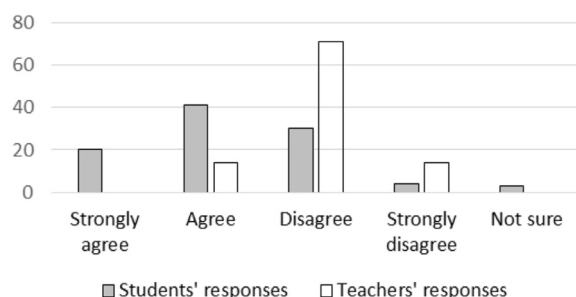


Fig. 7. Intrusive error correction.

interaction: teachers should reflect themselves and need peer-support and practice in using all modes of interaction: individual work, pair-work, group-work, and whole class work to make students feel comfortable in interacting with different people and in a foreign language. Overall, classroom practices require a lot of everyday effort and attention both from teachers and managers, and “quick-wins” are unlikely in this field.

The survey conducted has limitations of its own, as it reflects only the opinion of the people participating in the survey. To make the picture more objective, it is necessary to conduct lesson observations, the teachers' and the students' focus groups. This kind of many-faceted analysis can give a broader picture of the changes which have taken place over the course of the implementation of reform. This research into classroom practices is recommended for consideration by other Russian Universities that are heading towards global internationalisation of their institutions. This point of view gives us the understanding for future in-service professional development programmes, which should be designed in close collaboration with the teachers themselves.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding

agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Acknowledgements

This article has been improved in the process of revision and the authors are grateful to the reviewers and journal editor for their comments and suggestions. The review process itself was a source of learning and awareness-building about the standards and requirements for international publications.

The authors wish to thank Anna Muzafarova for her comments, suggestions, and editing the final draft of the article.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amper.2017.01.001>.

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